

Oppose H.B. 6633 – THE UNFAIR “FAIR SHARE”

Chairs Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, Ranking Members Representative Scott Senator Sampson, and members of the committee, my name is Maria Weingarten. I am a realtor, a former auditor with PwC and currently serve as a member of New Canaan's Board of Finance. I am here as an individual citizen and as a founder of CT169Strong to speak in opposition to HB6633, the Fair Share Plan.

There is an understood need for affordability in CT. Members of the legislature proposing Fair Share think the problem rests in the housing market and the solution is to forget decades of zoning and land use laws, individual property rights, local public hearings on individual building projects and specific environmental and infrastructure constraints and throw that out the window.

HB6633 seeks to bypass local planning and zoning authority to regulate land use in a “one size mandated to all approach.” Only local planning and zoning and members of the local community through the use of public hearings can provide critical information necessary to properly evaluate multi-family building projects within their own municipality. Why? Because all land is finite and unique and so are town resources and infrastructure. Locally elected leaders and Planning and Zoning members are most accountable to the residents of the municipality and can decide zoning issues in a manner that allows planned development without adverse impacts to the local infrastructure, the environment or historical preservation.

Mandating Housing development STATEWIDE as the global solution, is not the panacea to create affordability in CT. The bill does not consider the key components that need to be in place to optimally STATEWIDE: economic growth, creating new jobs and industry, pathways to careers, good schools, adequate mass transit and infrastructure.

Build it and they will come is fool hardy. It assumes cost burdened residents will want to relocate statewide to the mandated development of high-density multi-family apartments targeted in downtown areas. It may be a solution for other states with growing populations and vibrant economies, but that is not CT. It does not consider that CTs actual homeless population is just about 3,000 when it mandates municipalities to build 121K units of expensive to produce affordable housing for residents already living somewhere in homes or rentals but are cost burdened.

Newsflash, we are ALL cost burdened in CT when we have the second highest tax rate in the country and are last in federal funds coming back to CT. It is “death by 1000 taxes, and user fees” for residents and businesses in CT. This is consistent with a US News Report that ranks CT 46th for overall affordability, but when it comes to housing costs, we are actually 19th out of 50 States. Fair Share ignores that high density multi-family development without first improving transportation will cripple areas like Fairfield County, which has 3 of the 10 most congested highways in the entire country, one is the Merritt Parkway and North- and South-bound on I-95. I invite you all to join us at rush

hour midweek or often anytime between Stamford and Bridgeport to experience the pleasure for yourselves before you vote on such onerous legislation that does not bring affordability to our state and instead overburdens municipalities with high density market value apartment overdevelopment and exponential increases in property taxes. And who are we building the 121K units for when United Van Lines survey shows that out migration is returning to CT?

Solutions to create affordability: 1) Fix the Housing Choice Voucher Program by Centralizing Voucher Allocations and Waitlists - only 50% of vouchers are utilized in CT and that is unacceptable. That is the most direct way to help those impacted to bridge the affordability gap. 2) Instead of funding cities for affordable housing development provide seed funding to suburbs as well, like New Canaan, that have been building 100% affordable developments and recently completed the 100-unit Canaan Parish complex. This allows more towns to get to 8-30g moratoriums while deciding locally where to build affordable. The recycled 1975 FAIR SHARE concept from NJ that has not improved affordability there and has not been adopted by any other state in the country is not the solution. Good ideas are often emulated, bad ideas are not.

The Costs of FAIR SHARE development on municipalities remains undefined by housing advocates and must be understood before any bill is passed. The devil is in the details. CT169Strong has created an analysis that we have shared with you today:

- The estimated total cost if municipalities build the 121K mandated units runs between \$30 - \$54 Billion spread among the 162 municipalities. No town can afford to build that on its own. The cost to build runs \$250-450K per unit.
- If developers build the entire Fair Share with 20% set aside for the mandated fair share units, 48 of the 169 municipalities would have to DOUBLE the entire housing stock of their communities. That is an astounding amount of exponential development in 10 years. The infrastructure costs will be unsustainable.
- When towns cannot build and developers will not build because the highly prescriptive guidelines for development of extremely low-income units and the very low income units, every town will be in default of their mandate and then zoning in the entire municipality is defaulted to allow 20 units per acre in areas with town water and town sewer and every other area in the municipality on well and septic as much multifamily as the land can bare given health and sanitary limitations. **This bill ends single family zoning forever, which is part of the American Dream.** It overwhelms existing infrastructure, explodes local property taxes and the environmental impacts will be devastating.
- This impossible mandate is nothing but a gift to developers and their developer backed housing advocates that get to build as of right anywhere in our municipalities and get to sue them for lack of compliance and for damages. This bill alone will turn all suburbs into highly cities, destroy what has brought so many to live in CT the charming character that exists in every one of our 169 cities, suburbs and rural communities. This is not the answer.
- The impact to Fairfield County, which benefits from the economic engine of metro NY, and will turn all suburbs into highly dense cities with exponential property tax increases, with well over 25% tax increases on development alone.

So what is wrong with the fair share bill?

- This year's Fair Share bill retread has not defined the cost to every municipality -legislators and housing advocates promoting fair share and the news media should openly disclose the amount of units and the cost that will be mandated on each municipality.
- It gives decision making power on 1) gross total affordable housing units needed in the state, 2) a gross allocation made to every region in CT and 3) then an actual fair share allocation to each individual municipality to unelected appointed bureaucrats and developer backed housing advocates. Development decisions must remain with the municipalities: by local municipal leaders, local P&Z experts, local land experts most accountable to their residents, to ensure that any development is appropriate and based on the unique environment of each municipality.
- It eliminates consideration of market forces, like project viability and actual housing demand in different parts of the state. One can see from the most recent census that due to adverse economic factors in CT, population has declined in most of CT except Fairfield County, which benefits from access to the economic engine of New York City.
- It forces an arbitrary allocation of units to every municipality, decided solely by affordable housing advocates and planners on 4 very specific criteria: a town's grand list, household income difference, percentage of poverty and amount of existing multifamily housing. Three of those criteria are all closely related and these 4 factors do not consider the unique individual constraints that may exist within each municipality. Just because you build it does not mean they will come. If jobs and opportunity do not exist and if demand does not exist, is that an optimal location to build?

Based on OCA's website, New Canaan will be required to develop 20% of its existing total housing stock, or 1,350 units. Our cost is around \$607 million to be paid over 10 years. That is almost four times the town's entire operating budget of \$165 million. This is double what is required per 8-30g and some affordable categories recognized under 8-30g will not be recognized under Fair Share, creating additional bureaucracy for every town in CT. Building this many units by requiring developers to include 20% affordable in a housing development would mean doubling our entire housing stock in New Canaan! This bill will essentially force all suburbs to double their current population and they essentially become cities - the strain of local infrastructure expansion costs would be crushing to most communities and will increase local income taxes significantly.

Please stop treating the symptoms of unaffordability, and recycling bad bills and instead turn around CT's economy – that is truly the only sustainable solution. Thank you very much for this opportunity to submit testimony. Please Vote NO on bill HB6633.

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